

Best Practices

Recommendations on Teaching Writing

Source: Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels, Arthur Hyde, 2005. *Best Practices: Today's Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools*, p.105 and p. 77.

Increase	Decrease
Student ownership and responsibility by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • helping students choose their own topics and goals for improvement • using brief teacher-student conferences • teaching students to review their own progress 	Teacher control of decision making by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deciding on all writing topics • dictating improvement without student problem-solving • setting learning objectives without student input • providing instruction only through whole-class activity
Class time on writing whole, original pieces through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • real purposes and audiences for writing • instruction in and support for all stages of writing • prewriting, drafting, revising, editing 	Time spent on isolated drills on "subskills" of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, etc. Writing assignments given briefly, with no context or purpose, completed in one step.
Writing for real audiences, publishing for the class and wider communities	Finished pieces read only by teacher
Teacher modeling writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drafting, revising, sharing • as a fellow author and as demonstration of processes 	Teacher talks about writing but never writes or shares own work
Learning of grammar and mechanics in context, at the editing stage and as items are needed	Isolated grammar lessons, given in order determined by textbook, before writing is begun
Making the classroom a supportive setting, using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • active exchange and valuing of students' ideas • collaborative small-group work • conferences and peer critiquing that give responsibility to authors 	Devaluation of students' ideas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students viewed as lacking knowledge and language abilities • sense of class as competing individuals • cooperation among students viewed as cheating, disruptive
Writing across the curriculum as a tool for learning	Writing taught only during "language arts" period
Constructive and efficient evaluation that involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brief informal oral responses as students work • focus on a few errors at a time • thorough grading of just a few of student-selected, polished pieces • cumulative view of growth and self-evaluation • encouragement of risk taking and honest expression 	Evaluation as negative burden for teacher and student by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • marking all papers heavily for all errors, making teacher a bottleneck • editing by teacher, and only after paper completed, rather than student making improvements • grading punitively, focused on errors, not growth

Recommendations on Teaching Reading

Increase	Decrease
Teacher reading good literature aloud to students	Students compelled to read aloud to whole class or reading group, being corrected and marked down for errors
Time for independent reading	Exclusive emphasis on whole-class or reading-group activities
Children's choice of their own reading materials	Teacher selection of all reading materials for individuals and groups
Balance of easy and hard books	Exclusively difficult "instructional level" books
Exposing children to a wide and rich range of literature	Relying on selections in basal reader
Teacher modeling and discussing his/her own reading processes	Teacher keeping his/her own reading tastes and habits private
Primary instructional emphasis on comprehension	Primary instructional emphasis on reading subskills such as phonics, word analysis, syllabication
Teaching reading as a process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use strategies that activate prior knowledge • Help students make and test predictions • Structure help during reading • Provide after-reading applications 	Teaching reading as a single, one-step act
Social, collaborative activities with much discussion and interaction	Solitary seatwork
Grouping by interests or book choices	Grouping by reading level
Silent reading followed by discussion	Round-robin oral reading
Teaching skills in the context of whole and meaningful literature	Teaching isolated skills in phonics workbooks or drills
Writing before and after reading	Little or no chance to write
Encouraging invented spelling in children's early writings	Punishing preconventional spelling in students' early writings
Use of reading in content fields (e.g., historical novels in social studies)	Segregation of reading to reading time
Evaluation focused on holistic, higher-order thinking processes	Evaluation focused on individual, low-level subskills
Measuring success of reading program by students' reading habits, attitudes, and comprehension	Measuring success of reading program only by test scores